

**THIS IS OUR STORY**  
*Sermon for Pentecost 25C—Lk 20:27-38*  
LPC, 11/10/13

My story begins on July 12, 1955, the day I was born. I could do research if I wanted and discover what time of day, my exact weight and length, even my mother's blood pressure at the time of my birth, but I daresay that would be of passing interest, and not have a whole lot of bearing on the person I am today. Though, of course, if the events of July 12, 1955, with all of the details, had not occurred, I obviously would not be here today.

A more interesting story about my origins might be the one of my parents' meeting. My mother was an invited guest at the dinner party of some friends. My father showed up uninvited. My mother was furious. At 25 in 1949 she was something of an old maid. Having made up her mind to be a career girl, she was increasingly annoyed by her friends trying to set her up with available men. To top it all off, this Bill Byers was an engineer, a profession she found inscrutable. Assuming her friends had planned the meeting, she was mad.

The meeting had not been arranged. My father, who at 28 was still an innocent socially, was presuming upon their mutual friends' hospitality. Against all odds the old maid and the socially innocent engineer hit it off, and were engaged to be married within two weeks.

To my mind, that's a much more interesting story. This story has been polished by many retellings in my family. Who knows if it's completely accurate any more? But it is woven into my past and into my personality. This is a story that gives me identity and values. This story belongs to me and I belong to it. It's not hard to see what values this story represents to my family: fierce independence, the idea that love conquers all, and the notion that, when you find what you want, don't shilly-shally around. This has more to do with who I have been, who I am, and who I will be than my mother's blood pressure.

We all have stories that give us identity and values. Our stories give us identity and values. These stories have layers. My own story of origin is both the clinical story of my birth or the more colorful story of my parents meeting. These layers are not sequential in nature. They fold in on each other so that they are part of one another. The past is always a part of us. Perhaps a better thing to say is that are our stories are marbled, rather than layered.

Our stories are continuously unfolding from where we have been to where we shall be. God alone sees the completeness and the complexity

We all have such stories. You undoubtedly have such stories in your family. What's more, the other groups we belong to have stories that impart identity and values. As Americans, we have Betsy Ross sewing the first flag, George Washington crossing the Delaware, John Hancock signing his name extra-large to the Declaration of Independence. As Lawrencefielders we have the Spit & Whittle Shop, The Rev. Dr.

The Very Rev. Cynthia Byers Walter

Carroll Thorn leading an Exodus from St. Luke's on the Island, Mrs. Paull holding Sunday School in her big house across the street.

For Christians, the stories that give us identity and values most fundamentally are called the Bible. Think of applying this story theory to the Bible. Let's consider the creation story.

Science will tell us that the earth was born four and a half billion years ago from the cohesion of gases after a huge cosmic explosion. That to my mind is the clinical account: the part with the exact time and the blood pressure. The Bible gives the identity and values version: that God created the heavens and the earth, drawing beauty and order and life from chaos. Just like my own birth story, both versions are true. One gives just the facts, ma'am. The other gives identity and values. You can't necessarily get provable statistics from the biblical version any more than you can get identity and values from the scientific explanation.

The Sadducees in today's Gospel lesson from Luke are trying to trip Jesus up by trapping him in a duel of facts. But trying to reduce God's Kingdom of Heaven to statistics and rules is not going to work.

The idea of heaven is a story of identity and values. We belong to heaven. Our values are heavenly values. As humans we are not going to be able to parse out the statistics. Heaven is one of those complex ideas that God alone understands. Heaven is near, Jesus tells us. We participate in heaven in this life, as through a glass darkly. We glimpse heaven from time to time. We're invited to expand the experience of heaven in this life through our own actions. In this sense heaven already exists for us. We don't have to wait for it.

However we do believe that we will experience heaven more fully at some future point. Past, present and future are marbled where heaven is concerned. God alone understands both the complexity and the completion. Talking about heaven gives identity and values, if not facts. Talking about heaven gives our life direction and meaning the way facts cannot.

Before I close, let's apply story theory to Lawrencefield Parish Church. Lawrencefield Parish Church began with an opening service in June of 1956, though it must have existed before then as a sparkle in the eye of Carroll Thorn and others. That story is more than a statistic. It gives us today identity and values. We belong to that story. The story also gives us values: of evangelism, of Christian education for children, of serving this neighborhood on top of the hill. Identity and values give us a past, a present and a future, which are all marbled together and fully understood only by God. However, talking about our story, under God's guidance, will give our continuing life direction and meaning.

Today we hold our Annual Congregational Meeting: to celebrate our story, and to consider where it might take us next. This is who we are, and it's good. This is our story, this is our song.